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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

THE DIRECTOR

MEMORANDUM FOR: Regional Administrators
Office and Science Center Directors

FROM: *W. T. Hogarth*
William T. Hogarth, Ph.D.

SUBJECT: Implementation of the National Fisheries Information System

This memorandum requests your assistance in implementing the National Fisheries Information System (FIS). Responses are due not later than March 12, 2003, and an organizational meeting is planned for the week of March 24, 2003, in Silver Spring, MD.

Background

In December 1998, NOAA submitted a Report to Congress in response to Section 401 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act that detailed an implementation plan for a National Fisheries Information System (FIS). The FIS report to Congress provided a consensus conceptual plan of States, Councils, Commissions, industry and NOAA. The goal of the FIS is to address current issues in three broad areas: 1) data gaps and data quality; 2) enhanced technology and data integration; and 3) enhanced coordination and communication in the design, collection and uses of data collected by various State and Federal agencies. The plan was based on expanding existing regional systems to collect more and higher resolution data, while at the same time providing a nationwide structure under which the regional programs would operate with common goals, objectives and standards for data coverage, quality and data exchange.

The Office of Science and Technology (F/ST) led the effort to produce the report to Congress in collaboration with region and center staff as well as councils and inter-state commissions. The time has come to reaffirm NOAA Fisheries commitment to modernizing and integrating our data systems so that we may leverage and capitalize on our data collection, processing, and information technology support resources. VADM Lautenbacher has clearly established "an agenda for wise investment of our finite resources." Successful implementation of a functional FIS will respond directly to the Admiral's Strategic Plan Initiatives and cross-cutting priorities. In his January 21, 2003, email on the NOAA Strategic Plan he specifically identifies "integrated environmental observation and data management systems" as the first priority listed.

National integration is essential for enhanced quality assurance and quality control and to provide capabilities to measure the economics and performance of U.S. fisheries on a national basis. It is the only acceptable way forward. Simply providing non-duplicative counts of federally permitted vessels that participate in cross-regional fisheries is beyond the capability of our current systems. National integration will also provide opportunities to efficiently improve security, access, archiving services, and technological innovation. Many of our offices are

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FOR FISHERIES



responsible for similar business activities (permits, landings, logbooks, etc.) that undoubtedly capture a majority of the same variables but store them inconsistently. The agency can only benefit from consistent standards and a coordinated software development effort that can support these activities. There must be a regional commitment at all levels to succeed.

Taskings

In order to support integration of fisheries databases, F/ST staff will coordinate the overall effort and play a supporting role regarding coding, information content and QA/QC standards and as an IT application development center to assist regions (Center and Regional offices) in jointly developing and upgrading systems that will satisfy existing programmatic needs and augment NMFS requirements. F/ST, in collaboration with the Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), will establish an open, formal process to coordinate and direct national data integration over the next several years. Regional, Office and Science Center program experts will be included on all working groups and decision committees.

I am requesting that your programs provide, by March 12, 2003, electronic copies of the system documentation for any existing or planned programs under your supervision relating to four areas of immediate priority attention for integration of fishery-dependent data: permits, landings, logbooks, and observer data. Specifically, the F/ST needs documentation on system locations, software platforms, data dictionaries, table structures and relationship diagrams, requirements analyses, and procedure manuals.

This information will be compiled for review at an FIS planning meeting scheduled for the week of March 24, 2003, in Silver Spring, MD, to be coordinated by F/ST. The objective of the meeting is to compare database models and system capabilities. In addition, each Region, Office and Science Center should identify at least one project in FY03 in advance of the meeting that will upgrade an existing system to support national data integration relating to fishery-dependent data.

Please forward to F/ST the name of at least one IT and/or one fisheries statistics contact from your region, center, or office that will be able to attend the March meeting or subsequent meetings.

The result of the initial planning meeting will be a report that identifies ranked priority pilot development projects that will provide measurable short-term (FY03 & 04) and incremental long-term benefits in national data integration. I am particularly interested in integrating permit data across Regions and Offices. F/ST and the CIO's Office have each invested time in comparing different NMFS permit systems and in identifying impediments to integrating the associated data. These impediments currently constrain opportunities for providing web-based customer services.

F/ST has developed a pilot permit system with a core set of tables that has been adopted as the minimum identification data elements required for the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) and GulfFIN regional data management systems. The core data elements identified in this system are essential for meeting the goals of the FIS, and must be included in

all existing or planned permit systems. With that in mind, I am tasking the Office of Sustainable Fisheries with evaluating the most effective way of revising permit regulations in all our FMP's to require consistent identification data. The required elements include: the full legal names and birth dates of all vessel, corporation, and/or permit owners; employee identification numbers (for corporations); and hull identification numbers for state registered vessels (this could be phased in for those home built vessels so that state numbering offices are not overburdened).

I strongly encourage all Region, Office and Science Centers to aggressively pursue inter-regional and inter-office collaboration that will provide measurable results in terms of integrating national fisheries databases. We must seize opportunities to capitalize on and leverage our limited data collection, processing, and information technology resources so that all of our needs can be efficiently and effectively addressed.

cc: William Fox, Jr., Ph.D., F/ST
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